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THE ART UNION

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No. 1.

OUR ILLUSTRATIONS.

WITH this number we commence our series of etchings, in which we expect to present from time to time examples from all of the best painter etchers in the country. The demand for etchings, which has been so wonderfully developed in the last few years, shows more than anything else the growth of the public taste for art.

Mr. T. W. Wood's sturdy beggar, refreshing himself from his professional blindness by a sly peep around, Mr. J. C. Nicoll's breezy scene on the St. Lawrence River, and Mr. K. Van Elten's quiet pastoral, "The End of the Lake," happily tell their own stories.

NEW CASTS AT THE ACADEMY.

THE HERMES OF PRAXITELES.

THERE has recently been added to the large collection of casts in the Antique School of the National Academy a fine copy of the statue of Hermes, by Praxiteles. The unique and marvelous example of the golden age of Attic art, by one of its most illustrious interpreters, was discovered by Dr. Hirschfeld and his corps of German excavators on the 7th of May, 1879. It was found imbedded in a mass of potsherds in the cellar of a Doric temple in the Olympian Altis, at the foot of Mount Cronian, and was identified immediately as the statue of Hermes, from the chisel of the great master, Praxiteles, the only statue mentioned by Pausanias (in the 17th chapter of his 5th book) of the many thousands seen by him at Heraion (Temple of Juno), at Olympia, the site of the German excavator's happy discovery.

The Hermes is somewhat more than life size, and represents the god as a gracious youth in the prime of physical strength and beauty. His left arm rests upon a stump of a tree, and encircles the infant form of the little Dionysus, whom he is guarding with gentlest care. What was the action of the right arm is a puzzling question for the archæologists and the artists, since the fore part is unfortunately wanting, which loss, together with that of the legs below the knees, makes it difficult to determine with any degree of precision the exact intent and meaning of the sculptor. With these greatly to be regretted exceptions, the marble was found in a wonderful state of preservation after more than twenty-three centuries, the era of Praxiteles, the sculptor, having been near the close of the fifth century before Christ.

ARTISTS AND LAYMEN.

IT is well known that artists have always objected to intrusting their works to committees of laymen, either for arrangement in an exhibition or for judgment of their relative merits as works of Art. Why is this? It is because they know that the layman is almost always chiefly interested in the thing represented or in the story told, while the artist cares but little for the subject, but is most interested in the truthfulness of the representation, its artistic unity and power, or the beauty and skill of the manipulation. Who has not heard such remarks as these before a picture? "What is that picture about? I can see no idea at all in it," says the layman. "On the contrary, I think it a capital motive," answers the artist. "But what is the girl doing?" "Never mind what she is doing; whatever it is, it is done with graceful movement; don't you like the tone of the flesh and sky and water?" "Yes, but with such a sky the girl should be dressed in warmer clothes." "Oh, hang the clothes! see the lovely color of the neck and arms; they fairly shine in their warm brilliancy." "May be so; but what an ugly face," etc., etc.

And so the discussion goes on, the artist always interested in some artistic feature which is a little beyond the apprehension of the layman, whose objections are sound enough from his unartistic point of view.

Of course the canvas would be more valuable if no literary or common sense objections could be made; but its grade as a work of Art does not depend upon these.

Standing before a landscape, the layman would think of the beauty of the scene in nature or of its truthfulness to the topography of some place he knows with just such trees and rocks; whilst he may be oblivious to the fatal defects the artist sees—that the sky is made of tin, and that there is absolutely no atmosphere or tone in the picture, etc., etc. Besides, the layman is much influenced by the commercial value of the picture, or its size, or the reputation of the author.

The same thing obtains in literature. With every increase of knowledge in any art, we arrive at altitudes where we perceive possibilities of perfection undreamed of before, and of which no one who has not wearily climbed with us has any conception. We may not be able to master these subtleties ourselves, but at least we know that they exist, and they regulate the standards by which all professional work should be judged.

—PAINTER.